

## Ouroboros Unchained

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Summary: The end of the world is quite difficult to organize, inexorable though it may be. Humans have gotten pretty good at delaying it. But you can only run so far. With Yggdrasil crumbling, Mjollnir stolen, and Jormungandr betraying his father, Hiccup Haddock II has left his descendant plenty to deal with. But if he can't do it, no one can, partly because there'll be no one left to try.

## Ouroboros Unchained

**\*\*A/N:** How do I preface this? I'll start by saying hello. Welcome. Please wipe your shoes on the way in, and take a seat wherever. I'll be right there with refreshments and a story.\*\*

**\*\*Now,** a bit of explanation on how this is going to go. I pretty much know where I'm going with this, so that's good, but I've pretty much expended the muse to write HTTYD stuff on this opening, at least for now, which is less so. This means that unless I get a lot of people telling me that they like it, I'm probably going to prioritize my other stuff.\*\*

**\*\*Essentially,** you can consider this a low-priority story, UNLESS I get enough reviews from people who like it to convince me otherwise. That's not intended as a fishing technique—more just as a warning. Don't expect fast updates.\*\*

**\*\*But** I don't only want positive reviews. If anyone has criticism—reasonable criticism, that points out an actual problem—that's more than welcome too. I'm on this site to improve.\*\*

**\*\*As** with my other stories, you can expect a minimum of 5000 words per chapter. This one's right around there.\*\*

**\*\*But** as to the story itself... I'm not going to lie, it was significantly inspired by Hitchhikers, which I expect most of you have

read. It is, after all, the reigning kingfic of this archiveâ€"most reviewed, most favorited, and most followed all at once. But it's also intended to be original, and to do something that I haven't seen in this archive before.\*\*

\*\*Hitchups drew on history and mythology to create a fascinating setting, but the mythology in particular confined itself to plot devices and background. Not so here. The Norse mythsâ€"and not \_only\_ the Norse mythsâ€"will take a foreground view, and not just in terms of plot.\*\*

\*\*The Norse gods were decidedly \_characters\_ in their own myths, and I intend to do that heritage justice. Make of that what you will.\*\*

\*\*I'm writing this story with three things beside me at all timesâ€"a history book, a basic compendium of Norse myths, and that Dragonology book that was in every Scholastic book sale a few years back. Maybe it still is, I don't know. I will use all three of these resources to some degree, although that last I will use the leastâ€"mostly just to provide inspiration when it comes to dragons not from Northern Europe.\*\*

\*\*I will be using the Old Norse spellings of as many words as possible, or the nearest Anglicization I can find. Fair warning. Expect Icelandic lettering.\*\*

\*\*I think that's it, except that Iâ€™"obviously-don't own HTTYD.\*\*

\*\*If you're still reading and not skipping to the story, I applaud you. Enjoy.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>"<em>...If destruction be our lot we must ourselves be its author and finisher... We will live forever or die by suicide."<br>~Abraham Lincoln, January 27, 1838

"\_Don't wake me for the end of the world unless it has very good special effects."

><em>~Roger Zelazny, \_Prince of Chaos\_

\_\*\*Ouroboros Unchained\*\*\_

\* \* \*

><p>Prologue: How to End the World<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The old man looked over the great blue expanse before him, his green eyes weary and cloaked in wrinkles. The ocean crashed soothingly on the stony cliffs in waves below him, and the salty tang of the air freshened every breath.<p>

For a moment, the illusory peace filled his countenance so that he seemed almost untroubled, and as the worries faded from his face, so too the years seemed to until it was as though a much younger man, hair red rather than gray, was overlooking the Norwegian fjord.

This displeased the man behind him. He scowled over his braided black beard and poked at the older man with his chipped steel spear. "Well?" he grumbled, his deep voice raspy with years of shouted orders and malice. "Take your pick. The tale or the long jump."

The older man snorted and didn't even look at him. "What on earth makes you think you need to threaten me to hear my story?"

"I don't want the children's story, you old fool; I want the truth," said the spear-wielder with a quiet vehemence. "I want every sordid detail, and I want to know \_where the blasted hammer is\_."

Silence fell for a moment. "Mjǫllnir will not obey you," the old man observed at length. "To wield it would destroy you. It almost destroyed me."

"I'll be the judge of that." The words were not spoken with the arrogance and swagger that the man on the precipice had come to expect from such men, but rather with a quiet confidence which worried him far more.

He sighed. \_In the end, the gods will endure the wrath of this one man,\_ he decided at length. \_No man has ever managed to avoid underestimating them. Well, except for me. If the gods fall, it won't be this idiot who causes it.\_

"It'll be your funeral, then," he said aloud, fingering a silver amulet in the shape of a curled serpent that hung around his neck.

"It'll be yours if you don't start talking now, Haddock."

The old man smiled. "Come, now, Drago," he teased idly. "Surely we're on first-name basis by now, you and I?"

Drago Bludvist's scowl deepened. "I'd prefer not to kill you."

"Don't bluff; it's unbecoming," the Haddock chastised, amused. "You need me and what I know, or you think you do. You won't kill me." \_At least, not until I've told all.\_

"Then \_talk\_, before I decide you're a lost cause, Haddock!"

"\_Fine\_." The Haddock finally turned and studied the much younger man before him. "What story were you after?" \_Might as well have some fun while I'm still alive.\_

Bludvist ground his teeth. "Don't taunt me," he warned, and his voice was thick with hatred. "I told you; I want the \_whole \_story. You know which."

"Humor me, then," said the Haddock, but when he received no reply but a glare, he sighed. "You're no fun. Fine. I'll tell you about the First Ragnarǫk, and of the part I, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock II, played in it." He toyed with the amulet about his neck once more, for the last time. "And may the knowledge be your downfall." \_As it has now been mine.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"He's dead, Jǫrmungandr."<p>

The two creatures lingered side by side in the gray dawn. Divided though they were in this age, they were still brothers.

Though the gods had forgotten what that meant, they had not.

The great serpent, whose massive, lustrous bulk extended from the sea below to the air beside the grassy cliff, sighed; a thin hissing sound. His venom-green eyes sought the golden orbs of the gray wolf below him. "I know," he replied sadly. "I know, Fen."

"Then come back," Fenris begged his brother. "Whatever debt you owed the human has long since been paid. He doesn'tâ€\_can't\_â€need any more from you now. Come back to us, and Hel might even let you see him again."

Jǫrmungandr chuckled dully. "You still don't get it, Fenris," the world-serpent whispered. "It's not about debts and oaths anymore. It's about friendship and what's \_right\_."

"ÃsgarÃr wronged our fatherâ€wronged \_us\_!" The great wolf exclaimed vehemently, glaring at his brother. "They deserve death!"

"At the cost of everything else?" Jǫrmungandr asked idly. The conversation was an old one.

"If necessary," grunted Fenris grimly, "then yes."

"That's where you're wrong, dear brother mine," the snake murmured, leaning down to nuzzle the furry head below him. The wolf growled but did not shake him off. "ÃsgarÃr's people have failed to be the good rulers this world needs, but the end of everything is preferable to \_nothing\_. That is what Hiccup taught me. Vengeance leads only to voids."

"Voids take ÃsgarÃr then," Fenris mumbled without much rancor. "I'll stand by my father, as you should."

"Stand by a man who's as much a traitor as any of them?" Jǫrmungandr hissed pointedly. "I think not, Fenris. I'll stand by neither side if both are wrong."

Fenris blinked, his pupils dilating slightly in golden irises in his confusion. "What? You're not with ÃsgarÃr?"

Jǫrmungandr snorted. "Far from it, brother. I'm with MiÃgarÃr, and all that's in it. As my friend and teacher was."

"He's dead!" Fenris exploded. "What is this blind loyalty? Have you taken leave of your mind? It made some small sort of sense while he was aliveâ€you did seem to like him, I supposeâ€but now he's dead, and can't give you the company you seem to want! So why in NÃ-Ãhǫgg's name do you still follow him?"

Jǫrmungandr smiled down at the wolf. "Friendship, my brother," he

said quietly as he began to sink back into the water. "Maybe one day you'll understand what it means. Maybe, one day, you all will."

\* \* \*

><p>Imagine a world with dragons.<p>

In the year 476 C.E., Emperor Romulus was overthrown from his seat in Rome by the Germanic barbarians led by their leader Odoacer, who led his army on the back of a Deadly Nadder. Thus ended the reign of the dragon-hating (and occasionally dragon-eating) Roman Empire. But this is not that story.

In 1066 the Duke of Normandy, William the Conqueror, defeated King Harold of England using a revolutionary Air Forceâ€"dragon bombers raining death upon the enemy soldiers. Thus began a new age of Western history. But this is not that story.

In 1815, Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte was defeated by a coalition of the rest of Europe's powers, his air force meeting theirs in the skies above Waterloo. But this is not that story.

In 1945, the atomic bomb was dropped twice on Japanâ€"dropped by a single Night Fury, the only dragon fast enough to escape the explosion. Thus ended the Second World War and the two-thousand-year rule of dragons as the most destructive force available to mankind. Nor is this that story.

This story happened before any of that. When exactly, no one knows. The Roman Empire was in its declineâ€"the Pax Romana had endedâ€"but was still the dominant force in the world. The Far East was still closed to the Western world, and the dynastic kings ruled as they always had, beside their mystical Lung dragons.

In the west, across the sea, the tribal peoples were learning to love the world about them; to hunt the buffalo, and to domesticate the legless Ampitheres. In the southern continent of Africa, the tribes made small wars against one another and lived separate from the dragons they feared and lovedâ€"never befriending or weaponizing them, and never hunting them either.

This story began in the north.

There is a small chain of islands between Iceland and Norway. The islands are far enough apart to discourage travel, but close enough together for a common civilization. Here lived several tribes of the Nordic Vikings, feared across the world for their ferocity and skill in battle.

Among these islands is oneâ€"just north of Hopeless, and just south of Freezing-to-Death. Here lived the specific tribe known as the Hairy Hooligans, led by Stoick the Vast.

This was Berk.

Berk had been inhabited for a little over four hundred years, but every building on it was completely newâ€"built within the last year or two. The island was not particularly habitable. It snowed for more than half the year, usually, and hailed for the rest. This, however, was well-suited to its people. They were a hard breedâ€"tough as

nails, and unyielding as granite.

The only downside, in their eyes, were the dragons.

They came in the nightâ€”not every night, nor regularly, but predictablyâ€”and availed themselves of the livestock of the island, usually leaving a trail of havoc in their wake, occasionally punctuated by a serious injury or a death.

This was the situation in all of these islands, from the southernmostâ€”Almost-Warmâ€”to the northernmost at Freezing-to-Death. This was, to the Vikings, the Great Dragon War, and it had lasted three centuries.

It was now coming to a close, however. Three tribes had been completely destroyed in the past two decades, and the attacks were growing more common.

To make matters worse, several of the chiefs had been attacked and killed only a few years prior in a mysterious attack on a Thingâ€”a meeting of the tribes' leaders. The meeting had not been full, but Stoick was the only attendee to escape.

No suspicion was cast upon him, simply because Stoick was not known to be able to call down dragon-fire at will.

There was one young man on Berk who did not fit the Hooligan mold. He was a wiry, freckled youth with red hair and green eyes. His arms were defined with muscle, but did not bulge. He was strong, but slim.

He was a far cry from the conventional great bulwark of a man that was a Viking, which brought some shame to Stoick the Vast, his father. It lost the chief little respect, though, so well-loved was he.

But the boy had grown up a disappointment and a failure. Worthlessness was his constant companion.

His name was Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, named for one of the greatest heroes Berk had ever known.

They did not know his full story, however; nor his part in the First Ragnarok. But this is not that story.

Rather, this is its sequel.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hiccup!" the shout roused the young man from his thoughtful stupor, seated at his desk in the smithy. He looked at the door.<p>

The clan blacksmith, Gobber the Belch, was a smith renowned throughout the islands as being of nigh-unparalleled skill, as well as being a veteran soldier in the war. When he lost his arm and leg, he was forced into an early retirementâ€”which, Hiccup privately thought, was far preferable to the usual on-schedule retirement in Valhallaâ€”and had begun to work as a smith.

When Hiccup's body and mind had refused to conform to the Viking ideal, Gobber had suggested to Stoick that the boy might make a good apprentice to him, until he came into his own. "Put some meat on him bones," as the big cripple had put it.

It hadn't really workedâ€”Hiccup still looked as scrawny as ever, which was precisely the problem in the clan's eyesâ€”but what sat on his skeleton was pure muscle, and his strength suggested to him that it was actually very dense.

Not that he'd ever shared that observation with any of the Hooligans. They'd just laugh, ask what density was, and go off to dissolve their brains in alcohol or dragon-fire.

Currently, Gobber was standing in the door, eyes wide as he stared at Hiccup. "Raid!" he exclaimed at Hiccup's attentive inaction. "Get the weapons ready!"

Hiccup jumped up. "Yes sir!" he nodded and was immediately at the whetstone, sharpening away at all the weapons that had been left at the smithy in case of such a situation.

The whetstone was right beside the window, and so offered a good view of the chaos outside. Hooligans were running to and fro, some towards the smithy for weapons, others to the ballistae and the catapults, still more to the semi-useless palisade.

Every building on Berk was completely new. This was why.

As the weapons began to sharpen, he handed them out to the vikings crowding at his porthole, every so often turning to take something from Gobber and give it to a specific warrior with particular needs.

At last the last weapon was out. "Now what?" Hiccup asked Gobber quickly as the big man stood.

"Just stay outta the way," Gobber said in his Scottish liltâ€”not unkindly, but firmly. Hiccup nodded, unfazed. He was a source of trouble on Berk, and he knew it. He was a man of ideas, and ideas just weren't a Viking thing.

It didn't hurt anymore, he told himself, and forced himself to believe that the lie helped soothe the pain.

He looked over to the corner of the workshop where his newest inventionâ€”a high-velocity bola gun, which he thought might be able to down a dragonâ€”stood inconspicuously where Gobber had set it aside, ordering him not to cause trouble.

If I could just shoot one dragon out of the sky, he thought wistfully. That'd show them. All of them.

His heart leapt into his mouth then as a sudden screech filled the night.

"NIGHT FURY!" a Viking cried out.

"Get down!" another exclaimed.

Hiccup rushed back to the window just in time to see a nimble shadow cross the sky as a ballista burst into superheated blue flames.

He clenched his fist. \_No one's ever downed a Night Fury! The warriors don't stand a chance now!\_

His eyes narrowed. \_I have to do this.\_ There was no desire for glory in the thought any longerâ€”there was simply the knowledge that if no one took down that dragon, it would keep coming back and the Vikings would never win another battle.

And the bola gun was the only weapon capable of making that shot.

With that understanding, he rolled the weapon out of the workshop and onto a grassy knoll nearby.

Here, outside of the village, the night almost seemed peaceful. The sound of battle behind him were muted.

"Come on," he whispered as he readied the gun. "Give me something to shoot at."

And there it was, loud and clear in his ears. The telltale screech of a Night Fury charging its shot.

A watchtower was in front of him. It was the only potential target, given that the sound seemed to be flying the direction was facing.

There! There was a shadow to the left of the tower in the sky. It moved quickly, so quickly he wasn't even sure he'd seen itâ€”or he wouldn't be had he been anyone else. But Hiccup knew his strengthsâ€”it came with their being so fewâ€”and he \_always\_ trusted his eyes.

He heard the charge, saw the shadow, and aimed for the other side of the tower.

A blast, a light, and the tower was aflame. The light obscured his vision. \_Dammit, I can't see!\_

He shotâ€”blindly, in the dark, with faith as his only ally.

The bola connected. The dragonâ€”a great black beast, unadorned with colorâ€”fell to the ground near the Raven's Point peninsula.

Hiccup's eyes widened. "I did it," he said quietly. "\_I did it!\_ Did anybody see that?"

The question was directed to everyone who wasn't there. It was \_not\_ directed at the dragon that came up the knoll at that moment.

Hiccup blinked at it. It was no native to this part of the world; he knew that immediately. It was larger than most oceanic native breeds, and had only two legs like a Nadderâ€”but lacked the aggressive triangular head that was common to all Nadder breeds, bearing instead a box-like skull like no dragon Hiccup had ever seen. Its legs ended



in spindly clawed feet, and its eyes were black as midnight.

It growled at him deeply, menacingly. "Except for you," the young man muttered as he turned to flee.

He led it on a chase back to the village, zigzagging from side to side to avoid the fire that it only launched at him once. It nearly hit him with that, though, so he wasn't complaining.

Then his father was there, beating it away with its fists, and by the thin spout of weak napalm that emerged from its jaws, it was out of fire.

It flew away in defeat, but not before it had knocked down one of the great torches used to light the night and give visibility of the attacking dragons.

The torch fell down the mountain, knocking down a building, and freeing the newly captured dragons that had been caught in this raid from their net.

There was silence. The entire village glared at Hiccup, and Hiccup studied his father warily for any sign of rage. There were plenty.

Stoick sighed. "What the hell was \_that\_?"

"That was a Wyvern, Stoick," Sickfist Ingerman said, coming forward. "None has ever been seen north of the English Channel. Its in the Book."

"So, uh, I found a new dragon!" Hiccup said, desperately. "And I shot down a Night Fury, so..."

Stoick grabbed him and dragged him away.

\* \* \*

><p>"That thing is getting out of hand."<p>

Thor looked up at his father from under his thick red eyebrows, his bright blue eyes hard. He was standing at the lookout point near the top of the great silver tower Valaskjalf in the center of Asgard. His fists were clenched, but empty. Above him, on the throne Hlidskjalf which topped the tower, sat the All-Father himself, Odin, with ravens on his shoulders and a dragonskin patch over his left eye.

Thor clenched his teeth at his father's silence and continued. "It's power is growing constantly! It was reached out to the south and west, and it is only a matter of time before its eye turns to the east. The Lung would make terrible war on us if the beast snatched their children, and we must preserve our strength for Ragnarok!"

"So you would have us expend it against the Queen of the Gates?" Odin asked quietly, studying his son with his single sharp eye. "You would have us stretch our forces so?"

Thor snorted. "Defeating one dragon, even one so large and powerful,

would be an easy matter for your valkyrie, or even your einherjar. Merely commit the host for a day, and the matter is settled!"

Odin shook his head slowly. "Commit the valkyrie to the Gates of Hel? I think not, Thor. To do so is to invite an ambush by Loki's forces."

"Then let them come!" Thor exclaimed furiously. "Let Jǫrmungandr himself appear! I will have Mjǫllnir back from him if I must pry it from his stomach with my bare hands!"

"Peace, my son."

Thor subsided, looking up at his father in chagrin. "I am... sorry, All-Father."

"You are forgiven," said Odin quietly and wearily. "But you know I cannot help you to find Mjǫllnir now. Only two living things know where it liesâ€"even I cannot see itâ€"and both I cannot touch. Indeed, one is now in Hel's realm."

Thor froze. "The Haddock boy is dead?"

"Hardly a boy, now, after three hundred years," rebuked Odin gently. "But yes. His body as fallen into the sea, and even now, as I watch, Jǫrmungandr weeps for him."

Thor frowned, his red beard bristling. "Good. Let the snake mourn. Soon, he will join his human master."

Odin sighed. "Be not so eager to rush to death, Thor Odinson," he chastised quietly. "He will be only too happy to oblige."

Thor growled, but did not answer.

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup Horrendous Haddock II opened his eyes and shivered. He was lying on his back on a bed of ice, and over himâ€"<em>far <em>over him, so that mist clouded his visionâ€"an icy ceiling covered the world.

He sat up, stretched, and stood. He slowly turned, taking in the sights. "Well," he said aloud, his sarcastic lilt surprising him with his audible youth, "here we are. Hel. Charming."

The world was empty. Ice and snow surrounded him, and the frigid air was, fittingly, still as a corpse. Nothing moved.

Hiccup shrugged. "Well, it's pretty much what I expected. Boring as dirt."

"Not entertaining enough for you?" said a cold, high voice behind him.

He did a double-take, turning about in a flash. There, where no one had stood only a moment ago, was a woman. The right side of her body seemed human, but the red eye and marble-white skin belied her as more jǫttunn than man. The right side, however, was black as night itself, but otherwise looked exactly the same, with the same red

eye.

She was clothed in a shapeless gray gown, and her red eyes studied him watchfully, with a sharpness that he knew wellâ€”after all, it ran in the family.

He nodded, but neither bowed or knelt. "Hel," he greeted. "I'm surprised you're coming to see me so soon."

She was silent for a moment as her eyes scanned his face. "You should not be," she told him flatly. "I remember my brothers better than they remember me, I think."

Hiccup smiled slightly. "J  r remembers you, Hel. He misses you."

Her eyes narrowed. "You call him J  r?"

Hiccup chuckled sheepishly, rubbing the back of his neck. "He, er, doesn't like it when I do, but yeah. Don't tell him?"

Her face remained utterly impassive. "Of course not. I haven't seen him in centuries."

Hiccup's grin slid off his face. "Right." There was a moment of silence, but he interrupted it. "Well, if there's nothing else..."

"There is," Hel said flatly. "What did you do to J  rmungandr to make him betray our father?"

Hiccup froze and his eyes grew hard. "Do \_to\_ him?" he asked, and his voice was a razor. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Hel cocked her head. "This offends you?"

"What ever gave you that impression?" he asked caustically, his green eyes somehow growing more deadly than the godling's red ones.

"Why?" she asked simply, flatly.

He laughed. "All of you gods are so very \_animal\_," he said cuttingly. "All of you;   sir, Vanir, and all the rest. Not a one of you even knows what it means to \_feel\_." He glared at her, his eyes flaming green. "You want to know what offends me? The idea that I would treat my best friend the way that flaming Cerberus on your doorstep treats other dragons! The idea that I would do something  "anything  " \_to\_ J  rmungandr!"

There was silence for a beat. "This is friendship?" Hel asked, completely unruffled by the outburst. "This is love? This is the force that is said to endure even into my realm?"

Hiccup snorted. "That's it. Not much to look at, you think?"

"No," Hel said flatly, "but it is a lie. No other human has ever burst forth with such fire in this place."

Hiccup rolled his eyes. "You've never personally insulted their greatest friendships either, though, have you? 'Sides, I'm a bit more

familiar with your kind." He smiled at her, but his eyes were still hard as flints. "See, the difference between me and the rest is simple. \_You don't scare me\_."

Hel studied him and nodded. "Perhaps that is the difference," she agreed, still in her deadpan delivery, and still with that frigid soprano. "This has been enlightening, Haddock. Perhaps I shall speak with Jǫrmungandr."

"You do that," Hiccup said flatly, and turned away.

There was someone else there, and Hiccup recognized him from the statues he'd seen in and around Rome, when he and Jǫrmungandr had been exploring the Mediterranean.

He stared, and Death stared back.

\* \* \*

><p>Now imagine a world with gods.<p>

Not to say that no such entity or entities exist, but if they do, they certainly don't make it obvious.

Imagine that they do.

The atomic bomb was never dropped on Japan. It was never even invented. Einstein was never born.

Napoleon was not beaten at Waterloo. Nor was he exiled to Elba. He was never born either.

England was never conquered by the Normans. Duke William was never born either.

Rome fell, but it fell a little earlier, and to a force far greater than a barbarian horde.

Because a world ruled openly by gods is one ruled by fear, and that fear is justified. Gods are the creations of the mind of man, and so behave as men wish they could.

That means the capacity to make war beyond war's capacity to sustain itself. A world with gods is a world whose very existence is a time bomb.

And before humanity could even make history their own, the gods brought it to a climactic end. Ragnarǫk came and brought with it an ending.

When did Ragnarǫk happen? Who could know? There was no one to mark a calendar afterward and say, "This is the day the world died."

What we do know is this: in a world of gods, the gods will inevitably murder the world... except in one situation.

It is in the nature of the immortal to bring endings to that which is mortal. It is left to the mortal, then, to preserve it.

If mortal life is to endure in a world ruled openly by gods, then it

must be through either revolution, or by showing the gods mortality in all its naked beauty.

Either way, these movements must be led by an individual or group who can look gods in the eyes without flinching. Men who stand taller than the othersâ€”tall enough to be gods themselvesâ€”and yet choose to carry the rest upon their backs.

We know such men as heroes.

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you sure?" Stoick whispered.<p>

He, Gobber, and the village elder Gothi were huddled around a sandpit. Gothi looked grave and somber, and both Stoick and Gobber looked horrified now that they'd found out why.

Gobber translated the scratchings the woman made in the sand, his voice hoarse with shock and fear. "She's sure."

Stoick stumbled back and fell into a chair, his head in his hands. "To think," he murmured, "that this should come in my time. Have we not suffered enough war?"

Gobber put his hand on his chief shoulder. "Well," he comforted, "She di' say she wasnae sure. It might no' happ'n for a few decades yet."

"When Hiccup's chief," muttered Stoick inconsolably. "That's even worse!"

Gobber looked at him for a moment. "Ya know, he migh' be a good chief for us tae have in RagnarÃ¶k. Keeps a level head in a crisis. It just so happ'ns that 'level' for him is..."

"...Up in the clouds," Stoick finished darkly.

"Well, yes," Gobber agreed grudgingly.

Stoick shook his head. "Oh, Hiccup. I wish he didn't have to be here for this."

Gothi began scratching again. Gobber studied the symbols and frowned. "She says tae 'ave faith... what?"

Stoick looked at his friend in confusion. "What?"

"She says," the blacksmith translated quietly, "that this here isnae the first time RagnarÃ¶k's come 'round."

Stoick started. "What does that mean?"

"It's happ'ned and been prevented once a'ready," Gobber said in amazement. "Been prevented? By who?"

Gothi shook her head.

"She won' say who dun it," Gobber told Stoick. "Maybe she disnae know. It happ'ned three hundred years ago, though."

Stoick froze. "When the war started, in Chief Hiccup's time."

Gobber looked over at him. "Abou' then, I suppose," he agreed dubiously. "Ye think the dragons have somethin' tae do with this, Stoick?"

"They must," Stoick said quietly. "It makes sense. If we can take out the nest, maybe we can prevent RagnarÅk again."

Gobber watched him warily. "I don' see the logic tae tha', Stoick..."

Stoick ignored him, as he was wont to do when excited. "Call a meeting in the Great Hall, Gobber. All adult warriors. We're going after the nest."

"Those ships never come back, Stoick!" Gobber pleaded. "There mus' be a better way tae go abou' this!"

"We're Vikings, Gobber," Stoick stared at his brother-in-arms, his eyes hard. "We don't sit by and let the world end. I don't know how long we have, and I'm not going down without a fight. If I have to take a risk like this to have a chance at protecting Berk, I'll take it and be grateful."

Gobber looked after him as he left, then followed with a sigh.

Had he noticed Gothi scratching before he left, he would have read that Stoick's plan was, in fact, almost exactly the wrong thing to do.

\* \* \*

><p>Loki sat atop the mountain of Berk, looking down at the humans below, chuckling to himself gleefully. His sharp ears had caught all of Stoick's conversation and plans, and it positively tickled him pink to think that they were going to try to <em>prevent<em> RagnarÅk by marching on the Gates of Hel.

His grin turned feral as he thought on. The Vikingsâ€œOdin's living soldiersâ€œwould march on Hel's Gate, and there his forces would set upon them and crush them. They expected to fight dragons; he would give them a shock.

Draugr had that effect on the living. So did Fenris, come to that.

His smile faded slightly. \_A shame JÅrmungandr won't be joining us, he thought with displeasure. \_But \_NÃ-Ã°hÃggr\_ has weakened the \_Ã†\_sir enough for us to strike without him. Especially if it is true that Mj\_Ãllnir has been stolen. Even if it has not, our new alliance with M\_Ã°\_spellheimr should match Thor. If we reach the foot of Yggdrasillâ€œor if Yggdrasill falls firstâ€œwe win. We tear down the sky, and Surtr will burst forth in fire.\_

Loki giggled. \_And it all comes tumbling down.\_

He smiled to himself gleefully and then flitted away towards his daughter's realm, to ready her draugr.

Stoick would be coming within the next few weeks. Loki intended to ensure that he received a properly \_cold\_ welcome to his doorstep.

After all, the Æsir were known for their hospitality.

And Loki, as Odin never failed to remember, was an Æsir by blood and choice.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: As I said, don't expect updates too quickly. Review, if you can spare the timeâ€"it really does help. I hope you enjoyed this much of it. 'Til next time!\*\*

End  
file.